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ABSTRACT

Use of authentic content-based videotape recordings to integrate content with English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) instruction and English for academic purposes in college-level courses is discussed, particularly as it is relevant to the Japanese university context. Focus is on adaptation of techniques used in the United States for sheltered English instruction and on selection of appropriate video materials. Ideas are offered for choosing and customizing documentaries, movies, television commercials, public service announcements and government films. An example of each of these video types is offered, with specific classroom activities suggested. Contains three references. (MSE)

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Content Video in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

With the growing number of content-based courses now being offered to Japanese university students, it is important to consider how to shape such classes in a manner that is appropriate for students who are neither prepared for, nor necessarily interested in, the type of intensive content-based EAP class offered in most overseas universities. If, as seems logical, language acquisition should be a co-equal with non-language related goals in a culture or Area Studies class in Japan, it is necessary to find techniques and approaches that attempt to integrate methodologies designed exclusively forEFL and EAP classes. This article discusses how to use video techniques that work well in a communicative-oriented EFL setting with authentic video that might ordinarily be used in other academic disciplines The videos used range from documentaries and movies to commercials, public service announcements and government sponsored propaganda

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Content Video in the EFL classroom

The growing acceptance of content teaching within EFL as a motivator for students has led in recent years to the creation of native-speaker-taught content courses in the English language departments of many universities. While some universities restrict these classes to higher level students, many others are open to students at the intermediate level Such classes are necessarily different from so-called content-based courses offered to ESL students in overseas universities. The latter are designed for intermediate and upper-intermediate students who hope to enter overseas junior colleges or universities. Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) have published useful guidelines for teaching EFL (or "sheltered") content - based teaching courses to foreign students studying in an English speaking country. But how can these guidelines be adapted to content based classes in Japan, in which only a minority of students in the class intend to study in an overseas university?

Content Teaching in Japan

The reasons for the growing trend towards content teaching in Japan are too numerous and complex to discuss here. They are clearly evidenced, however, in the large increase in students who plan to study, or have already returned from studying, overseas. These students, as well as many others who hope to use English in their work after graduation, make up a small but significant minority of able and genuinely interested students capable of handling a content based course. It is thus now possible in many universities and colleges--most of which are now dismantling their General Education departments in accordance with Mombusho guidelines--to create genuine content courses or seminars, especially in the field of Area Studies. At the same time it is self-evident that these classes, made for a homogenous group of students living in their own country, cannot and should not be identical to those in a foreign institution itself.

Some useful general guidelines for designing and adapting content teaching methods used in foreign institutions to the Japanese university environment are outlined by Halvorsen and Gettings (1996). The authors emphasize the "unique opportunities" that arise when teaching EFL students from the same cultural and linguistic background. In this environment, they suggest, it is particularly important to find an appropriate balance of content and language. In their effort to find this balance, the authors utilize a wide variety of nontraditional sources,such as posters, travel brochures, maps and magazine articles, to stimulate interest in students who might not respond to a conventional textbook. Both also devote considerable time to developing mini-lectures at the appropriate level, and place an emphasis on project work and peer-edited written assignments. Video, too, is mentioned by the authors as an example of a visual component in their content classes, but the general nature of their article does not allow for a discussion of how to best make use of what may arguably be the single most important resource in content teaching in the L1 culture.

At its best, video can inform and stimulate students in a way that no lecture, however well delivered and thought out, can do. Indeed it seems self-evident that video could be an effective component of almost any content class. At the same time, however, its tendency to induce passivity in students, and the difficulty of adapting it to the EFL classroom, leave it wide open to misuse. Indeed even the most enthusiastic proponents of using authentic video in the EFL classroom would probably accept that the vast majority of material cannot be easily or effectively applied to classroom activity. Put another way, the selection process for choosing suitable authentic video and then adapting it to the appropriate level of the students is far from obvious, and is invariably both time-consuming and unscientific. It is for this reason, of course, that commercially made EFL video courses are produce, although this material too, while linguistically appropriate, has many drawbacks, most notably its artificiality and amateurishness. Like any other skill then, using authentic video effectively in EFL, not only

requires some experience in the basic techniques of video use and materials creation, but also demands a certain intuition and a knowledge of students' own educational backgrounds. While there is no short-cut to achieving this expertise, the following guidelines may at least help to lessen problems in the video selection and adaption process.

Suggestions for Selecting and Customizing Content videos

Most of the ideas outlined below are adapted from other academic disciplines, especially history and sociology. Students of these disciplines, however, are principally expected to absorb, analyze and process the information in the video. This information is often presented in the form of documentaries which frequently use historical or contemporary footage, together with interviews and explanatory narratives, in order to illuminate an event or help define an issue. Commercials, government propaganda and public service announcements are more commonly used in sociology or psychology, and in this case students are usually asked to analyze the images and words for their subtexts and assumptions, rather than their actual content. Yet, in both cases the main expectation of students is a written analytical report or verbal comments in a discussion setting. While some of these expectations may apply to an EFL content class in the L1 environment, several modifications are obviously needed if the video in question is to be useful both for language and content. These can summarized as follows:

(a) Documentaries: Documentaries should be used only if the visuals are dense, varied and can stand alone. In most cases they should have English or L1 captions. This would apply to most American documentaries, which have encoded closed captions, and also to some overseas programs shown on Japanese satellite television. In general interviews should be edited out or considerably shortened and the total length of any segment shown should be less than a third of the total class time. Documentaries should be used largely as a supplement to a (text based) unit on a particular topic and students should have done some background reading or preparation on the topic before watching. This may involve activities built around the relevant vocabulary, but may also include an effort to activate the students' individual L1 schemata developed in their high school studies of this topic. Finally, and most importantly, interactive and communicative information gap activities and assignments, similar to those used in conversation or reading classes, should be designed for lower intermediate and intermediate students.

(b) Movies: Entire movies should not be shown in class, but carefully selected extracts from subtitled movies which deal informatively with a topic or issue can be edited and used as part of a larger unit. In addition, students can select from a teacher-approved list of movies with a strong cultural or historical content and watch it for homework over an extended period. Among the many assignments that could accompany this is a "movie notetaking" diary in which students take notes about what they have learned, both with respect to content and language. (Furmanovsky, 1994) Films should have either Japanese or English subtitles. Student "movie notetaking diaries" and carefully edited extracts from the films can be the basis for class activities.

(c) TV Commercials: Perhaps the biggest advantage of commercials is that they are relatively easy to find and prepare, in part because they are short, succinct, and, most critically for content teaching, often have a cultural component. From a purely linguistic point of view, they frequently use idioms, expressions and double meanings which are of interest to students of colloquial English. Like any other video source, however, commercials have their limitations for content teaching. Relatively few commercials actually have a narrative or tell a "story." Finally the need to sell a product often tends to narrow the content and language of the

commercial. Yet some commercials work extremely well in the content classroom because they reveal clear cultural differences in behavior or thinking and advertise something that would never be advertised in the students' own country, e.g a political party or a certain type of product. Some commercials also refer to (and then sometimes make fun of) a stereotyped image or character from the L2 culture.

(d) Public Service Announcements and Government propaganda : Unlike commercials, public service anouncements do not sell a particular company's product or service. Usually made by the government or a non-profit organization, they give advice or information about an issue. Public service announcements can give an additional insight into the culture of the country in which they were made, since they sometimes reflect that culture's societal goals, as well as its sense of morality. Thus while they can be prepared by the instructor in much the same way as a commercial, students should be asked to focus on whom the announcement is aimed at and what behavioral change is being promoted. Government propaganda films, documentaries and old movies with clear stereotypes can be used to give insight into changes in attitudes towards issues such as race, alleged national character, women's roles, and a wide range of other issues. Since propaganda has usually been at its most extreme during war, video made during the era of the two world wars is particularly interesting for students. Some of these sources have been compiled in documentaries dealing with these issues, such as *Rosie the Riveter* (Women in World War II), *Ethnic Notions* (Stereotypes of African-Americans).

Examples of Activities for Content Teaching Through Video

Since the content videos recommended here vary in almost every detail, suggestions for adapting them to the EFL environment can best be done on an individual basis, by category.

Documentary: *The Flapper*: This half-hour highly visual documentary of 1920's American women who adopted the attitudes and style of the so-called Flapper was edited down to 15 minutes by removing most of the interviews used by the film makers. Prior to viewing this closed captioned video, students read a two-page segment in an American junior high school textbook for homework. While watching, they are asked to note down how the Flappers differed from their Victorian predecessors, and are then given a multiple choice question which asks them what new habits or lifestyles of middle class women Flappers were illustrated in the video. Six correct and four incorrect (but plausible) answers are given. However almost all of the answers can be derived from the visuals alone.

Movie: *Civilization* (D.W Griffith, 1916) This is an antiwar film made by D.W Griffith in 1916 at the time of the mass loss of life in the battlefield trenches of Belguim and France. A two-minute extract from the film is used in a documentary (*An Ocean Apart)* on British-American relations during World War I. No effort is made to go into the details of World War I in class, but a brainstorming session can be used to pool the students' background knowledge on the conflict, and this is usually sufficient to ascertain the basic information. Students watch an edited, closed-captioned documentary (supplemented by a short lecture) on the lead up to U.S intervention in World War I and the role of the early Hollywood studios and directors as reflectors of American public opinion. They are then told that they will see a movie made by the leading director of the day, at a time when most Amerians and the U.S President opposed any intervention. The movie deals with a war between two unnamed European kingdoms which represent two real countries. In the scene shown, there is an antiwar demonstration in one of these countries and the king puts the leader of this antiwar demonstration into jail. The king visits the leader in jail to make fun of him, but while mocking him, he has a vision or dream in which the antiwar leader becomes the ghost of Jesus Christ and guides the king

through the battlefields of the war where so many people have died. The king now realizes his awful mistake and ends the war. Students are given three written interpretations of what the "message" or moral of this scene is and they are asked to choose the correct one. In order to do so, they must identify the image of Christ and interpret his gestures to the King. Some relatively difficult but short text (of the type usually found in silent films) also gives some clues. This excercise closely matches those that students might be asked to complete in a Reading class, but the visual element considerably increases the interest and motivational level.

(c) Public Service Announcement: *Whose Side Are You on.*, 1996. This is a series of PSAs made by the non-profit American Advertising Council's Coalition for America's Children. It uses real-life individuals and realistic situations to show how children in America's inner cities are menaced by drugs and crime. Viewers are asked to contribute to, or become involved in, other organizations which are working to help such children. A 30 second segment on "Mad Dads," a group of African-American men who superficially resemble gang members, but who are in fact African-American fathers who patrol their neighborhoods to monitor crime, is used to help break stereotypes that may be held by students about the African-American father and the African American family in general.

Conclusion:

The appeal of video seems to cross most boundries that can be found in the EFL classroom, including student level, age, culture, topic and teaching environment. Given some of the challenges inherent in creating an appropriate level content course for intermediate level students in the L1 environment, the use of edited and customized authentic video in combination with the kinds of communicative and interactive activities which work well in the EFL classroom-based activities seems rational. Indeed, together with the approach outlined by Halvorsen and Gettings, it seems as likely as any approach to bridge the gap that intermediate students might otherwise fall through in this kind of challenging course.

Brinton, D.M., Snow, M.A., & Wesche, M.B. (1989) Content-based Second Language Instruction. New York: Newbury House Publishers.

Halvorsen, J. & Gettings, R. E., (1996) Designing and Teaching a Content Course. *Curriculum and Evaluation: Proceedings of the JALT International Conference on Language Teaching/Learning*. Tokyo, p. 34-37.

Furmanovsky, M. (1994) The Video Listening-Viewing Diary, *The Language Teacher* 18:4

Rosie the Riveter , *Ethnic Notions* , *An Ocean Apart* , *The Flapper* and *Taken For A Ride* are all TV documentaries that have been shown by the U.S. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). See the PBS Internet homepage-http://www.pbs.org- for more details.